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Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-eighth session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the PARIS21 (PARIS21) on statistical capacity-building. The report, which is presented to the Commission for information, outlines PARIS21 efforts to promote the use of better statistics as a central part of the enabling environment for development progress, particularly through support to countries in the design, implementation and monitoring of national strategies for the development of statistics, through advocacy and by encouraging donor collaboration in statistical support programmes. The Commission may wish to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2008/1.

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Report of the Steering Committee of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century on statistical capacity-building

I. Introduction

1. The overall goal of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS21) is to develop a culture of evidence-based policymaking and implementation that serves to improve governance and government effectiveness in reducing poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. PARIS21 focuses its efforts on assisting developing countries in the design, implementation and monitoring of national strategies for the development of statistics in order to have, inter alia, nationally owned and produced data for all Millennium Development Goals indicators and all development policy needs by 2010.

2. A national strategy provides a country with a focus for strengthening statistical capacity across the entire national statistical system. The national strategy will provide a vision for where the national statistical systems should be in five to 10 years and will set milestones for getting there.[1]

II. Progress of PARIS21 in 2007

3. PARIS21 supports national strategy processes primarily through the following types of activities: (a) advocacy and the development of statistical advocacy tools; (b) regional programmes; (c) promotion of donor collaboration; (d) development of national strategies methodology; and (e) satellite programmes. Progress made in 2007 under these activities is provided below.

A. Advocacy and the development of statistical advocacy tools

4. PARIS21 advocacy efforts include targeted interventions at specific international and regional meetings and the production of tools. An encouraging development resulting from PARIS21 advocacy interventions includes a scaling-up of investment in national statistical systems (see para. 12). Among the advocacy tools produced by PARIS21 in 2007 are the following:

(a) A booklet entitled "Counting down poverty: the role of statistics in world development", which shows the vital role of statistics in development and poverty reduction;

(b) A booklet template entitled "Why does country X need good statistics", which targets government and donor support. Tailored booklets have been produced for Gabon, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania and the United Republic of Tanzania, in collaboration with each country's national statistical office.

[1] For a more detailed discussion of national strategies for the development of statistics, see E/CN.3/2005/18.

B. Regional programmes

5. PARIS21 regional programmes are focusing increasingly on country-based activities and include various components, such as the promotion of partnership; the mobilization of technical and financial resources; and on-demand advisory services to countries. Among its achievements in 2007, PARIS21 was instrumental in securing an agreement to create a Central American regional statistical commission. In addition, with the assistance of PARIS21 and other partners, all Central American and Andean countries have finalized the design of their national strategies and are starting the implementation process. The clearest example of the power of PARIS21, however, may be the case of the national statistical office in Niger, where PARIS21 provided a full range of on-demand support. PARIS21 provided advice on the design of the country's national strategy, helped the country secure funding for the process through the World Bank's trust fund for statistical capacity-building, assisted the country in including the national strategy in its national poverty reduction strategy and supported the country's case at a donor consultative group meeting.

C. Promotion of donor collaboration

6. PARIS21 convenes an inter-agency task team whose function is to report on donor support for statistical capacity-building. The team evolved out of a pilot project (the "Light reporting exercise") that PARIS21 had conducted in 2005-2006 in sub-Saharan Africa.[2] In 2007, the team, now dubbed the "Partner reporting system on statistical development", produced a review of existing partner reporting systems, a classification of statistical activities, a typology of financial and non-financial partner support for statistics and a study on the suitability of using the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development creditor reporting system to extract information on support for statistical development. The team is currently considering a proposal for a refined, updated version of the reporting exercise drawing heavily on the creditor reporting system. These points will be discussed in greater depth within the Bureau of the PARIS21 Steering Committee in January 2008 and at the February 2008 session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities.

D. Development of methodology for a national strategy for the advancement of statistics

7. In close collaboration with its partners, PARIS21 produces methodological guidance for countries interested in pursuing strategic planning for statistics.[3] Among the papers produced in 2007 were the following:

(a) "Mainstreaming sectoral statistical systems in Africa: a guide to planning an integrated national statistical system", which provides guidance to the staff of national statistical offices and of sectoral statistical offices on how to work together to mainstream sectoral statistical systems into national statistical systems;

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[2] For a more detailed discussion of the light reporting exercise, see E/CN.3/2007/25.

[3] Documents are available from http://www.paris21.org/knowledgebase/.

(b) "A guide to using a system-wide approach to implement national strategies", which outlines why scaling up investment in national statistical systems is needed and provides operational guidance for national statistical system managers and funders on how to use a system-wide (or programme-based) approach to support the strengthening of national statistical systems (see para. 12 for more information).

E. Satellite programmes

8. The PARIS21 secretariat oversees the implementation of two satellite programmes: the International Household Survey Network and the accelerated data programme in pilot countries. Both programmes were quite active in 2007.

9. The International Household Survey Network has two primary objectives: (a) to promote the better use of survey microdata; and (b) to improve the quality of future surveys. The Network has developed or is in the process of developing three tools to be implemented by the accelerated data programme, namely, the microdata management toolkit, a survey question bank, and the survey quality assessment framework.

10. To strengthen country capacity in producing statistical data relevant for policy design, monitoring and evaluation, the accelerated data programme undertakes three main tasks: (a) documentation, preservation and dissemination of existing survey microdata; (b) analysis of existing survey data and assessment of past survey programmes; and (c) development of improved survey programme and data collection. A combination of the tasks has been carried out in 24 pilot countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. A further seven countries have expressed interest in participating in Programme activities. Among the lessons learned so far are that (a) microdata production is vast and hidden; (b) microdata dissemination is limited and mostly ad hoc; and (c) there is a high demand from countries for technical tools, policy guidelines and training.

11. The Metagora project, also hosted within the PARIS21 secretariat, focuses on methods, tools and frameworks for measuring human rights and democratic governance. In 2007, an independent panel of experts completed its evaluation of the project's implementation and outcomes and produced an assessment report that presents Metagora's strengths and technical shortcomings and formulates a number of important recommendations aimed at enhancing the project's scientific, technical and professional basis. The second phase of Metagora is being shaped by these recommendations. Furthermore, throughout 2007, special attention was put on advocacy activities and a set of Metagora training materials were released through the web.

III. Future directions of the work of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century

12. In 2008, PARIS21 will partner with international institutions, regional organizations and bilateral donors in a scaling-up of investment to national statistical systems. This will involve applying a system-wide approach, drawing lessons from the sector-wide approaches used successfully in such areas as health, education and agriculture. In general, applying a system-wide approach to statistics

involves using the national strategy as a framework for coordination both across sectors and between donors. The aim is to make donor assistance coherent and to reduce transaction costs by setting out the objectives and results to be achieved and by establishing common mechanisms for implementation, monitoring progress and reporting.